

**TESTIMONY OF  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY  
AFFAIRS FRANKLIN D. KRAMER  
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**March 21, 2000**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and other Members of the Committee to discuss security aspects of the Administration's policy toward the Korean Peninsula.

**CONTEXT**

US efforts to steer North Korea toward more acceptable and responsible behavior have accomplished some notable successes over the past several years but have also left much more to be done. The North Korea policy review conducted by Dr. William Perry grew from an awareness that security and political circumstances have been evolving on the Peninsula and that we must constantly reassess the premises and objectives of our overall policy approach to ensure that they meet our bottom-line security needs. Dr. Perry's review placed in bold relief the importance of pursuing with renewed vigor US concerns over DPRK programs possibly related to nuclear-weapons acquisition and ongoing missile activities.

Regardless of the refinements of our policy toward the DPRK, the one unalterable starting point of the US security calculus on the Korean Peninsula is the importance of maintaining a close alliance relationship with the Republic of Korea. This relationship, based on shared interests and common values, is unshakable and manifests itself in the integrated US-ROK command structure, the robust US-ROK combined exercise program, and the presence of 37,000 US service members in South Korea. All these elements of our deterrence posture in Korea help to ensure the security of the ROK and stability on the Peninsula and in Asia. In this regard, US security ties to the ROK are the reality on which the hopes of our diplomacy are founded.

**NORTH KOREA POLICY**

US policy toward North Korea is informed by a central dilemma: at present, the DPRK is too reprehensible to fully embrace but too dangerous to completely ignore. Therefore, over the past six years, the US has sought to identify its most pressing security concerns with the North and then find some basis for addressing these issues, primarily through bilateral channels but also in multilateral fora. The most important agreement reached to date has been the October 1994 Agreed Framework, which still serves as the foundation for our dealings with North Korea. The Agreed Framework froze the North's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and Taechon under international monitoring and provided for their ultimate dismantlement. In exchange, the North received heavy fuel oil and the pledge of two proliferation-resistant light water nuclear

reactors, to be constructed by an international consortium founded by the US, the ROK , and Japan. The Agreed Framework remains an essential guarantee of peace and stability on the Peninsula today and an important barrier against the outbreak of a renewed crisis. Such a crisis could quickly result in a direct conflict given the concentration of forces at the DMZ, the minimal decision time available to assess threatening military moves, and the inherent paranoia of the North Korean regime.

Therefore, the Department of Defense sees great value in the maintenance of a properly functioning, strictly-enforced Agreed Framework. US determination to ensure that the DPRK adheres to its obligations under the Framework was demonstrated in our insistence that the North grant us access to a suspect site at Kumchang-Ni that we believed might be connected to an underground nuclear program. While we found nothing nuclear-related at the site, we could not determine its true purpose definitively and so we will continue to monitor its development through various methods, including a follow-up site visit this year.

However, the Agreed Framework has not been sufficient to address the array of concerns and issues that make our relations with the North so potentially volatile. This was underscored with alarming effect at the end of August 1998 when the DPRK launched a Taepo Dong 1 missile, with a satellite payload attached, over Japan. In light of the North's record of destabilizing behavior and its persistent threats against the ROK and Japan, this step by the North was extremely disturbing and provocative and served to spur stepped-up diplomatic and security consultations with our allies in Northeast Asia. The missile launch also catalyzed trilateral planning for coordinated responses across the range of policy instruments, political, economic, and security-related.

Against this backdrop, Dr. Perry began a thoroughgoing review of US policy toward North Korea in the fall of 1998. Ten months later, after much study and close consultations with Congress and our ROK and Japanese allies, he recommended a strategy focusing on US security concerns over DPRK nuclear weapons- and missile related activities as our highest priority. Dr. Perry's approach envisioned two paths. On the first path, the US would be willing to move incrementally toward normalized relations with the North in exchange for the DPRK's cooperation in eliminating critical security threats to the US and its allies. These threats certainly encompass suspected nuclear and missile activities, but also ultimately cover the broader range of concerns related to all weapons of mass destruction, an offensively-postured DPRK conventional force arrayed near the DMZ, and the North's refusal to pursue meaningful inter-Korean tension-reduction through direct contact with the ROK government.

If the North rejected our offer to improve relations and eliminate sources of hostility, then the US, in close coordination with its allies, would have to take additional steps to ensure the containment of the DPRK threat. The US and its allies would have to take measured but firm steps with the aim of persuading the DPRK that it should return to the first path and avoid destabilizing the security situation in the region.

## COORDINATION WITH OUR ALLIES

As General Schwartz, the new Commander of US Forces on the Peninsula in Korea, has indicated in his recent appearances before congressional committees, the US-ROK alliance remains one of the linchpins of our influence in the region and lends weight and credibility to our policy initiatives on the Peninsula. To these ends, the US-ROK alliance has never been stronger. The ongoing extensive DPRK winter military training cycle this year and Pyongyang's continued investment in military assets even as North Korea as a whole suffers under great hardship provides telling confirmation of the need for this strong alliance relationship.

Understandably, our overriding focus on the Peninsula is sustaining deterrence and being prepared to respond in the event of provocation or attack from the North. I can assure you that US-ROK combined forces are better equipped and more ready now than at any time in the history of the alliance. The US has in recent years been engaged in ongoing efforts to modernize its Peninsula forces with the latest military equipment, including AH-64 helicopters, Bradley Fighting vehicles, Global Positioning System receivers, frequency hopping radios, and a pre-positioned heavy brigade set. These measures have been complemented by ROK efforts to outfit its military with the most modern tanks, personnel carriers, and self-propelled howitzers. The ROK commitment of resources to defense has been notable given the economic hardships that have burdened the country in recent years.

In short, there has not been, and never will be, any complacency or dropping of our guard on the Peninsula. GEN Schwartz and his staff are constantly working with their ROK colleagues to strengthen our combined deterrent. The tight coordination between US and ROK military establishments, from fighting positions along the DMZ to policy offices in Washington and Seoul, ensures that readiness will not be compromised. The bedrock of peace is, and will remain, vigilance. And in maintaining that peace, the US and ROK will insist that the Armistice Agreement that suspended hostilities in 1953 remain in effect until a new peace regime is concluded between South and North Korea.

The imperative of close coordination extends to US and ROK security discussions with Japan also. I have personally worked very hard to build a structure for trilateral consultations and coordinated security steps that will strengthen our deterrence posture in addressing crises on the Peninsula. Trilateral coordination reduces the potential for DPRK adventurism by casting US, ROK, and Japanese security efforts as a synchronized response and ensuring an optimal, synergistic use of our respective defense assets. Our purpose is not to unduly provoke the DPRK, but to take advantage of the natural intersection of security objectives among the three countries and ensure that our combined strength dissuades the North from ever resorting to military means without understanding that the cost for Pyongyang will be high.

## ACCOUNTING FOR THOSE STILL MISSING IN KOREA

The Department of Defense, with its focus on deterrence, has had little direct contact with its counterpart organization in North Korea, the Korean People's Army. But one area where we have pursued exchanges and direct contacts with the KPA is in providing the fullest possible accounting of those still missing from the Korean War. While the DPRK has cooperated on this issue in the past in arranging joint recovery operations in the North, its current intransigence on this issue is a severe disappointment. We have an obligation to the veterans and the families of those still missing to make it clear that progress on accounting for those missing from the Korean War is of central importance in our bilateral relationship with the DPRK. We will continue to pursue arrangements for joint recoveries operations on terms that are acceptable to us and that honor the memory and sacrifice of those service members who never returned from Korea

## CONCLUSION

While the North Korean willingness to engage with us under the terms spelled out in the Perry approach is still not entirely clear, our diplomatic efforts to date have yielded noteworthy security benefits. Aside from the freeze on North Korean nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and Taechon under the Agreed Framework, the DPRK commitment last fall to suspend long-range missile tests while talks on improving bilateral relations with the US continued was a significant step. These accomplishments are a foundation on which to build and call for intensified efforts to draw the North into a deeper diplomatic process that will address continuing concerns about destabilizing programs and activities of the North. Efforts to curtail all the destructive aspects of North Korean behavior will be a long-term enterprise and will demand great patience, but they are absolutely worth the effort as long as they are coupled with a strong deterrent posture and remain true to our long-term objectives on the Peninsula. From a security standpoint, the alternative could very well be direct conflict with the North, which would take a devastating toll in lives and resources. For this reason, it is important for the US to adhere to the Agreed Framework and to continue pursuing the objectives of the Perry process for the foreseeable future.